

February 5, 2008
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Vice Chairman Rick Harris, Matt Hewatt, and Pasco Gibson. Also present were the County Administrator (Hunter Walker), County Engineer (Roger Blaylock), Marine Extension Agent (Christina Verlinde), and Public Works Director (Avis Whitfield). Vice Chairman Harris called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Hewatt moved approval of the minutes from the January 8, 2008 meeting; Gibson seconded, and the vote carried unanimously. (3-0)

Chairman Issues

None

Mulat Bayou Dredging Report

Blaylock said the channel at Mulat Bayou was constructed during FDOT's (Florida Department of Transportation) construction of the Interstate 10 Bridge. He showed aerial photographs dating back to the 1988/1991 time frame. Blaylock said the aerials show there was an existing channel at that time. He said the channel that was permitted and constructed by the County does not follow the existing channel. Blaylock discussed the difference between the county constructed channel and today's existing channel. He said the spoil site used during the channel construction is currently an FDEP (Florida Department of Environmental Protection) permitted stormwater pond. Blaylock said the previous spoil site will be very difficult to utilize for spoil. He said the County is lacking a spoil site close to the project. Blaylock said if a spoil site is located, the estimated cost to dredge Mulat Bayou channel is \$200,000.00. He said he has copies of the 1998 dredging permits. Blaylock said he felt the proposed dredging can be permitted with the FDEP and Army Corps of Engineers, but he is not sure of the impact of the new environmental resource permitting that Northwest Florida Water Management is putting in place. He said staff anticipates Northwest Florida Water Management will follow other water management districts in the state and allow exemptions for manmade channels and canals making permitting for dredging possible without mitigation. Blaylock said the cost will go up if mitigation for impact of wetlands is involved in the dredging. He said he recommends not impacting wetlands. Blaylock said the only other alternative will be to use a hopper barge arrangement for the spoil. He said the FDEP does not like hopper barge dredging because they want to make sure that all spoil material goes into a permitted upland location. Blaylock said the lack of depth of the water is another issue for using a hopper barge. He said staff is still researching alternatives for a spoil site for the dredging project.

Hewatt asked if there are any uses for spoil material. Blaylock said spoil can be used for fill material if it is clean. He said the biggest issue with spoil material is that the FDEP wants the spoil to be placed in some type of uplands site. Blaylock said the County has placed spoil in uplands sites in the past. He said the spoil typically ends up in a borrow pit or in a landfill as cover material.

Harris said he felt tug boats being used by the Interstate 10 Bridge contractor are kicking up sand into the channel. Blaylock said the current channel being used is not the channel the County put in place. He said the path has been altered. Blaylock said he is not sure if FDEP will permit a straight shot channel. He said the channel can be permitted if the original path of the channel is dredged. Harris said any path dredged is better than existing conditions in the channel. Verlinde said she is hoping the County can get a permit for the dredging and the bridge contractor can do the dredging.

Harris said he updated the Mulat Bayou Homeowner's Association about the current status of the dredging project for the Mulat Bayou channel. He said the Mulat Bayou Homeowner's Association formed committees to address the need for dredging of the Mulat Bayou channel. Harris clarified ERP (Environmental Resource Permitting) regulations will change in October, not EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) regulations.

Blaylock asked if the area being shoaled in is located after clearance of the bulkhead. Gibson said yes. He discussed problems with the narrowness and shallowness of the channel, especially during low tide.

Oyster Shell Restoration Project

Verlinde said an oyster restoration project is being considered between White Point and Garcon Point. She said Amy Baldwin with FDEP is here to discuss the proposed project. Baldwin said in order for the project to be called a restoration project there must be proof of the presence of historical oyster reefs. She said pictures of the oyster reefs that used to exist in the White Point/Garcon Point area will be very beneficial in getting approval for the oyster shell restoration project. Harris asked if pictures of fish caught in that area will help. Baldwin said pictures of fish may help because she is putting together a proposal through U. S. Fish and Wildlife's Coastal Program to get funding for the project. She said most federal agencies use NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) funding, so proof that the project will help NOAA trust resources (certain species of fish) is wanted. Baldwin said the program manager at U. S. Fish and Wildlife supports this project. She said her research of the Garcon Peninsula and how it contains endangered and threatened species of plants and animals gives more credence that the oyster shell restoration project will help support NOAA's cause. Baldwin said the oyster shell restoration project is in the design phase. She discussed the staggered reef system design of the restoration project. Baldwin said the staggered design will allow for tidal exchange to come up into the marsh, slow down the wave energy, and limit the amount of erosion currently occurring. She said she hopes to be able to set the reef back far enough to allow the marsh to expand waterward to where it was before the reefs were blown over by Hurricane Ivan. Baldwin said fossilized oyster shell is being proposed for this project. She said the fossilized oyster shell is very inexpensive. Baldwin said she hopes the County will allow use of the vacant land by Dickerson City Boat Launch as a staging site for the oyster shell. She said the plan is for the State to purchase a small barge for the project utilizing the Garcon Point Bridge Restoration Trust Fund. Baldwin briefly discussed how the oyster shell will be hand deployed.

Harris said the reef will stick out of the water if it is built 3 or 4 feet high. Baldwin said height will depend on the water depth at the site. She said the plan is for the reefs to be intertidal with low tide and submerged with high tide. Baldwin said the FDEP will place buoy markers at the site. Gibson said the area proposed for the project is very muddy. Baldwin said she realizes there will be some settlement. Gibson discussed two natural oyster reefs that were located in close proximity to the proposed restoration site prior to Hurricane Ivan. He said the natural oyster reefs were submerged at all times. Gibson said Hurricane Ivan washed both oyster reefs up onto the beach. He asked if the reef being proposed is a conservation type reef and not a harvesting reef.

Baldwin said correct. She said the project is for restoring the habitat that the reefs provided. Gibson asked if there is any conflict between this project and a project previously discussed at a Marine Advisory Committee meeting. Verlinde said there is no conflict. She said the other project is in an area further south. Baldwin said signs prohibiting oyster harvesting will not be placed at the restoration site. Gibson said he is in favor of the restoration project.

Blaylock asked at what depth the proposed barge will need to operate in. Baldwin said FDEP is looking for a small barge. Blaylock said the Dickerson City Boat Launch area is very shallow. Gibson asked if FDEP has considered using the canal located by the project site. He said there are plenty of vacant lots in the Garcon Point area, and he felt the property owners will not object to the use of their property for this cause. There was discussion on possibly using private property and the canal by the Garcon Point area as a staging site.

Gibson asked if the FDEP will be purchasing or borrowing a barge for this project. Baldwin said borrowing a barge instead of purchasing one will be great if a proper one is available. Gibson asked if the amount of shell to be deployed daily for this project equates to a dump truck load. Baldwin said possibly a dump truck load over the period of one week. She said this oyster shell restoration project will take a couple of years to complete. Harris asked if the amount of oyster shell for the entire project will need to be stored at a staging area or just one dump truck load. Baldwin said initially there will be approximately 24 tons of shell needing to be stored at a staging area. She said then the oyster shell will be ordered on an as needed basis. Whitfield said the Garcon Point Boat Launch can be used for a staging area to store the oyster shell if only 24 tons of oyster shell needs to be stored. Baldwin said 24 tons will be the maximum amount of shell needing to be stored at one time. Gibson said the Interstate 10 Bridge contractor is planning to sell several Carolina skiffs, and he said a Carolina skiff would make a perfect barge for this project. Baldwin said she appreciates any suggestions or ideas the committee has for this project.

Other Business

Scott Mason asked if anything is being done about the large derelict vessel at the foot of the Navarre Bridge. He said the vessel has been abandoned for quite some time. Walker said Florida Fish and Wildlife is working on getting the derelict vessel removed. Mason said the vessel will make an excellent fishing reef if it is cleaned up and deployed in the east LAARs (Large Area Artificial Reefs) area. He said he spoke with Robert Turpin who stated the derelict vessel most likely meets all the qualifications to be used as an artificial reef. Mason said the derelict vessel is in Santa Rosa County so removal is the responsibility of Santa Rosa County, but he said Turpin stated he will help with making the derelict vessel a reef. Blaylock said the derelict vessel is not the responsibility of Santa Rosa County. He said funding to turn derelict vessels into artificial reefs is a problem. Harris said he is not aware of any grants available for an artificial reef project. Mason said the State of Florida allocated money for reef projects such as this. He said the FWC (Fish and Wildlife Commission) stated they receive \$700,000.00 annually to develop artificial reefs. Mason said the FWC may be able to fund deploying the derelict vessel as a reef project. Harris asked Verlinde to check with FWC to see if funding is available. Verlinde said declaring a vessel to be derelict is a lengthy process, and the vessel in question is not completely through the process. She said it may be cheaper for the owner of the vessel to deploy the vessel as an artificial reef than it will be to haul the vessel off to a dump. Harris said the County can not currently do anything with the vessel because the vessel still belongs to the current owner. Mason said the vessel is clearly abandoned and is leaking diesel fuel. Hewatt discussed the lengthy process he went through to get a vessel located on his property declared a derelict vessel. Verlinde said she will send information on the derelict vessel process to Mason.

There was discussion on the east LAARs area. Walker said he thought there were problems with the east LAARs area. Mason said Turpin stated renewing the permit for the east LAARs area will most likely be held off until new reef requirements are clarified. He said the new minimum weight limit being proposed for artificial reefs will prevent him from being able to deploy reefs. Mason briefly reviewed artificial reef regulation changes being considered.

Mason said there is a meeting in Panama City on Thursday concerning Red Snapper regulations. He briefly discussed the proposed Red Snapper regulations and said the newly proposed regulations will have a detrimental impact on the economy in Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties. Mason said he would like any support the Marine Advisory Committee can provide to help save fishing rights. He discussed an economic study researching the impact of the Destin charter fishing industry on the Okaloosa/Walton economy. Harris asked if Mason wants the State Red Snapper regulations to remain as they currently are. Mason said yes. He said he is trying to get the FWC to realize that Florida is huge and one standard can not work for the entire state. Mason said there is documented proof that Red Snapper is plentiful in Northwest Florida. He said he would like to see Florida's coastline regionalized and discussed how the regions should be divided. Gibson said the FWC gets Red Snapper information from the National Marine Fisheries Service. Harris said the National Marine Fisheries Service does not include Red Snapper located around artificial reefs in its numbers, only Red Snapper located on the natural bottom of waters. Gibson said he agrees with regionalization as discussed by Mason. There was discussion on the way the federal government breaks up the Gulf of Mexico into sections, and the possibility of the State creating a similar model for their regulations. Mason said Red Snapper regulations and artificial reef regulations are being unfairly changed. He said conditions and habitats are not the same for the entire state; therefore, one standard can not be set for the entire state.

Harris asked if the Marine Advisory Committee members would like to send a letter supporting Red Snapper regulations to remain as they currently are or request a letter of support to be sent from the Board of County Commissioners. Walker said it is not possible to get a letter of support from the Board of County Commissioners by Thursday. Harris said there will be several meetings after Thursday's Red Snapper regulations meeting, and a letter of support can be sent at a later date. Gibson discussed good luck he has had with other fisheries' issues in the past. He said he supports sending a letter of support to the FWC's Chairman if the Board of County Commissioners approve a letter of support. Gibson asked when a final decision on Red Snapper regulations will be made. Mason said he is not sure. There was discussion on when the final decision on Red Snapper regulations will be made. Verlinde said she can check when the final decision will be made for Red Snapper regulations. Gibson asked for clarification that the support being requested is to leave the Red Snapper regulations as status quo. Harris said correct. He asked the process for sending a letter of support. Walker said he felt Harris can send a letter of support as Vice Chairman of the Marine Advisory Committee. He said Harris needs to get with Verlinde to make sure all correct information is included in the letter of support.

Mason said buses are being taken to Thursday's Red Snapper regulation meeting, and he invited any interested party who supports leaving Red Snapper regulations as they are to join him.

Scott Martin asked the percentage of reef programs deployed in state or federal waters by the County. Verlinde said all artificial reefs are deployed in federal waters.

Next Meeting/Adjournment

The next scheduled meeting of the Marine Advisory Committee is Tuesday, March 4, 2008 at 5:00 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the Marine Advisory Committee, the meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.